DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 655 HE 033 831

TITLE	Review of Research: Report on Consultation.
INSTITUTION	Higher Education Funding Council for England, Bristol.
REPORT NO	HEFCE-01/17
PUB DATE	2001-03-00
NOTE	15p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Higher Education Funding Council for England, Northavon House, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol, BS16 1QD, England. Tel: 0117-931-7317; Fax: 0117-931-7203; Web site: www.hefce.ac.uk.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrators; *Colleges; *Educational Finance; Educational Policy; *Evaluation Methods; *Financial Support; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Questionnaires; *Research; Responses
IDENTIFIERS	*England

ABSTRACT

This document reports the results of the consultation (questionnaire responses from higher education institutions) on a review of research policy and funding by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) published in September 2000 and outlines the HEFCE response to the review and the consultation. Responses were received from 164 institutions of higher education. The proposal to continue to fund research selectively, on the basis of quality at a departmental level, was supported by the higher education sector and other stakeholders. The principles underlying the Research Assessment Exercise proved uncontroversial, with 98% of the responses supporting the retention for the process of research assessment outlined, which was to be based on peer review. More than half of respondents agreed with the review's recommendations that the HEFCE should maintain funding levels for departments with ratings of 5 and 5* in the future. Nearly 90% of respondents supported the proposal that funds should be retained for departments rated 3a and 3b. There was unanimous support for the creation of an independent Arts and Humanities Research Board. Respondents also supported exploring new funding streams, working with other bodies to establish standards for research degree provision, and studying progression for women and minority faculty and staff development in general. (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 450 655

March 01/17

Report

Review of research

Report on consultation

R. Kier

2A

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND hefce

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

© HEFCE 2001

The copyright for this publication is held by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The material may be copied or reproduced provided that the source is acknowledged and the material, wholly or in part, is not used for commercial gain. Use of the material for commercial gain requires the prior written permission of the HEFCE.

Review of research: report on consultation

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of universities in Northern Ireland
Of interest to those responsible for	Research policy and funding
Reference	01/17
Publication date	March 2001
Enquiries to	John Rushforth, tel 0117 931 7123 e-mail j.rushforth@hefce.ac.uk

Executive summary

Purpose

1. This document reports the results of the recent consultation on our review of research (HEFCE 00/37), and outlines our response to the review and the consultation.

Key points

2. The proposal to continue to fund research selectively, on the basis of quality at a departmental level, was supported by the sector and other stakeholders.

3. The principles underpinning the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) proved remarkably uncontroversial, with 98 per cent of consultation responses expressing support for the retention of a process of research assessment based on peer review. The UK funding bodies will formally report on the future of the RAE early in 2002.

4. More than half of respondents agreed with the review's recommendation that the HEFCE should maintain funding levels for departments with the ratings of 5 and 5* in the 2001 RAE. We will protect funding levels for 5* and, if possible, 5 rated departments following the next RAE.

5. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents supported the proposal that funds should be retained for departments rated 3a and 3b (the lowest ratings that receive research funds). We will fund 3a and 3b rated departments after the 2001 RAE, at levels to be determined when the results are known.

6. There was unanimous support for the creation of an independent Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) with Research Council status.

7. We will explore the viability of a new stream of funding for capability development as recommended by the review, and

expect to report progress in the autumn. Such a fund may support research of regional as well as national importance, in fields of emerging significance.

8. There was encouragement to the Council to implement the recommendations of the review by working with other bodies to establish minimum standards (and good practice) for research degree provision, and exploring means to help institutions meet those standards, including assisting collaborations.

9. The proposal to investigate barriers to career progression for women and minority groups was extremely well supported, and we will be initiating such a study in the near future.

10. There were more reservations about the proposal to require institutions to submit a staff development strategy as a precondition for the release of HEFCE research funding, with about one-third opposed. However, this recommendation has been superseded by HEFCE proposals to develop mechanisms for allocating earmarked funds to institutions, the release of which would be linked to staff development strategies.

Action required

11. No action is required.

Background

12. In September 2000 we published a consultation paper (HEFCE 00/37) requesting the views of the sector on the 38 recommendations of the review of research. The consultation closed on 8 December; 164 responses were received. We would like to express our gratitude to all those who gave generously of their time and expertise during the course of the review and the consultation exercise.

13. We received responses from higher education institutions (HEIs), other funding bodies, learned societies, subject associations and users of research. There was a very high level of agreement between the views of HEIs and those of other respondents.

14. The review recommendations were grouped into four broad themes:

- research funding
- research assessment
- impacts on other activities
- people issues.

Research funding

15. There was a consensus in favour of retaining selective funding as the basis of HEFCE research funding policy, and in favour of the RAE as the key instrument underpinning delivery of that policy. There was also near unanimous support for the present policy of operating selectivity at a departmental rather than an institutional level.

16. The research review committee recommended that:

- the unit of resource for 5 and 5* departments be guaranteed (subject to a review of the cost of research in different units of assessment – UoAs)
- departments rated 3b and above should continue to attract funding after the 2001 RAE.

17. More than half of respondents agreed with the review's recommendation that the HEFCE should maintain funding levels for departments with ratings of 5 and 5* in the 2001 RAE.

18. However, there was widespread concern that this should not be at the expense of the rest of the research base. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents supported the proposal that funds should be retained for departments rated 3a and 3b (the lowest ratings that currently receive HEFCE research funds).

19. The HEFCE Board has agreed to maintain the rate of funding of 5* departments and has said that it expects to do the same for 5 rated departments, subject to the availability of funds. It also decided that 3a and 3b departments will definitely attract funding, but the level of support will not be determined until the RAE results are known. If resources are limited, the top priority will be to protect 5* rated departments.

20. The review also recommended that generic research (GR) funding should cease and that collaborative research (CollR) funding should not be renewed. We note the reasoning in the recent 'Review of generic research' (HEFCE 00/48) and accept that GR, in its current form, should be discontinued. We will decide how to use the funds released when we know the outcome of the 2001 RAE, and have a full understanding of the environment in which funding decisions are to be made.

21. There was unanimous support for the creation of an independent Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) with Research Council status. In 2001, the AHRB will become a company limited by guarantee.

Research assessment

22. The principles underpinning the RAE proved remarkably uncontroversial: 98 per cent of consultation responses expressed support for retaining a process of research assessment based on peer review. It was accepted by 83 per cent of respondents that the HEFCE should continue to assess research on the basis of quality alone. It was also generally accepted that RAE assessment panels should be given more freedom to define the characteristics of excellence obtaining within their disciplines. Where there was disagreement, it related to the scope of the assessment rather than its nature.

23. The process of the exercise to follow the 2001 RAE will be considered jointly by the UK funding bodies, and a report is expected early in 2002.

Impacts on other activities

24. The review and consultation endorsed the policy of seeking to develop mechanisms for the targeted distribution of a portion of 'third leg' funding. This is designed to increase links between HE and business, through initiatives such as the Higher Education Reach-out to Business and the Community (HEROBC) fund.

25. The review proposed that scholarship undertaken to support teaching activity, or to maintain the ability of academics to teach effectively, should be considered as being supported by the HEFCE's funding stream for teaching. However, it acknowledged that other activities sometimes included within definitions of scholarship have been assessable through the RAE and fundable through research funds, and recommended that this should continue. Examples of such activities would include the reinterpretation of existing knowledge in the humanities, and pedagogic research relating to higher education. This was generally accepted by respondents to the consultation, although about one-third of respondents were concerned that the report's definitions of research and, by extension, scholarship, were too narrow.

26. The HEFCE Strategic Committee for Learning and Teaching will continue to review scholarship to establish whether there are issues at the boundary between scholarship, research and teaching which require a policy response. In addition, we will shortly be announcing a further major investment in pedagogic research which will benefit those researching the learning process in HE. However, we consider that research intended to shed light upon the teaching of a subject is equivalent to other forms of research, and should continue to compete for funding through the RAE as at present.

27. The review proposed the establishment of a new funding stream for capability development to support research of regional as well as national importance, in fields of emerging significance.

28. This proposal received a generally positive response, though a significant number of the more research-intensive universities were opposed. Over the coming months we will be entering into discussions with other funders to establish the viability of such a scheme. Should the scheme prove viable, we plan to present proposals to the sector in autumn 2001.

29. The review proposed that a proportion of QR funding should be earmarked for investment in infrastructure. The consultation revealed that, while institutions felt that they were best placed to make decisions on spending, the Council could usefully provide advice on appropriate levels of investment. Accordingly, we will not be earmarking any QR funds for infrastructure investment, but will provide institutions with guidance from autumn 2001.

People issues

30. The review made four recommendations concerning the training of research students:

a. Research training should be the subject of a separate, but linked, assessment process to the RAE.

b. Funding provided by the HEFCE for the training of research students should be calculated and allocated separately from the funding provided for research.

c. The HEFCE, together with the Research Councils and other stakeholders such as industry and charities, should develop minimum requirements which departments would need to satisfy in order to be eligible for HEFCE funding for postgraduate research student training. The research assessment process should be extended to establish whether departments comply with these minimum standards.

d. Collaborative arrangements should be established to enable units to meet all aspects of the postgraduate research training requirements, where they might not be able to do so alone. The HEFCE should separately work up the practical arrangements to implement this recommendation.

31. These recommendations were generally well supported, but respondents to the consultation were eager to stress the importance of integrating any new assessments with the existing quality assessment processes (for either teaching or research) rather than developing an additional exercise to be 'bolted on' to the RAE. We will develop proposals in this area: the research review sub-group on people issues continues to sit and will report to the HEFCE Board on the issues summarised above during 2001.

32. More specifically, we intend to consult upon draft minimum standards and proposals for an assessment process in autumn 2001. We also plan to make concurrent progress on developing means for encouraging collaboration and otherwise assisting institutions in complying with minimum standards. Outline proposals will be included in the consultation. The financial incentives linked to such a policy, and the financial implications both for the HEFCE and for HEIs will be reviewed in the light of the RAE results.

33. The review made two further 'people-related' recommendations, designed to improve the sector's ability to maximise the potential of all its intellectual capital, for the benefit of the individuals and institutions concerned. These were that:

a. The HEFCE should consider the reasons behind the under-representation of women in the highest-rated departments, and whether other groups appear not to be realising their full research potential. This work would be carried out initially through the human resources sub-group.

b. Institutions should be required to submit a staff development strategy as a precondition for the release of research funding.

34. The proposal to investigate barriers to career progression for women and minority groups was extremely well supported, though there was concern about what the funding bodies could do to overcome some of the barriers that were cited. We will be initiating such a study in the near future. It will not seek to confine itself to issues of specific relevance to research policy but will instead take a broader view of the factors affecting career outcomes for women and minorities in higher education.

35. There were more reservations about the proposal to require institutions to submit a staff development strategy as a precondition for the release of HEFCE research funding, with about one-third opposed. It was felt that, although there were ways in which the organisation and assessment of research inform staff policies within institutions, human resources (HR) issues should be dealt with in a way that does not attempt to isolate 'research issues' from wider HR concerns.

36. In fact, this recommendation has been superseded by the proposals in HEFCE 00/56, 'Rewarding and developing staff in higher education'. This sets out mechanisms for allocating earmarked funds to institutions, the release of which would be linked to staff development strategies.

Annex A

Summary of responses to the consultation

The consultation closed on 8 December 2000. We received 164 separate responses: 102 from English universities and colleges, 32 from subject associations and learned societies, and 30 from other organisations. An analysis of the responses to each of the consultation questions is presented below.

1. Do you agree that the HEFCE should continue to fund selectively on the basis of quality?

There was overwhelming support (98 per cent of respondents to this question) for this recommendation from all groups of respondents. There was a firm consensus that the HEFCE should continue to conduct assessment and calculate funding at a departmental rather than an institutional level. This consensus applies not only to the RAE but also to PhD provision and other areas where new assessment activity was suggested.

2. Do you agree with the aim of balancing support for existing excellence with opportunity for new areas of excellence to develop?

There was overwhelming support (99 per cent of respondents to this question) for this recommendation from all groups of respondents.

3. Do you agree that considerations of 'critical mass' should play no part in the funding decisions of the HEFCE?

There was very strong support (91 per cent of respondents to this question) for this proposal. Many respondents recognised that such a policy would constrain panels in setting criteria in a future RAE. However, even those standing to benefit generally recognised that any benefits linked to critical mass would be reflected in assessments of research quality and should not therefore be double counted. It was also widely believed that panels ought to avoid using critical mass as a proxy for excellence.

4. Do you agree with the intention to protect top-rated departments?

Opinion was evenly divided, with strong support from research-intensive institutions and learned societies. Respondents identified as the central dilemma the need to balance the objective of supporting and nurturing excellence with a desire to preserve the diversity of the research base.

5. Do you agree that funds should be retained for both 3a and 3b rated departments?

This proposal enjoyed support (88 per cent of respondents to this question) from all groups except those institutions which would directly benefit from the abolition of funding for some or all 3 rated departments. HEIs divided upon predictable lines; the real headline was the overwhelming support among non-HEI respondents for protecting funding for 3 rated departments (38 in favour, 1 opposed). Several respondents noted that the report did not recommend guaranteeing the unit of resource for 3 rated departments, and this may be one reason why the proposal proved so uncontroversial.

Even HEIs that were opposed tended to feel that institutions on an improvement track should not have their funding cut off. The strongest opposition to this proposal came from those fearing a squeeze of 4 rated departments. A very small number of such responses suggested guaranteeing the unit of resource for all 4 and 5 rated department by abolishing funding for 3s.

6. Do you agree that there is a need for specific funding to high-performing units in English HEIs to enable collaboration with centres of excellence overseas?

This proposal was among the least popular (25 per cent of respondents to this question). Such support as was expressed tended to be conditional upon additional funds being found. The general view was that any available funds ought to be distributed as quality-related (QR) funding – a view held equally strongly by all classes of respondent.

7a. Do you agree that there should be no more than the current number of units of assessment?

There is clearly no great appetite for wholesale reform of the UoA structure (82 per cent of respondents to this question). Some respondents, while happy to assent to the general principle, felt that the recommendation should make it clear that the realignment of UoAs was not a 'zero sum game' and that the recognition of new disciplines should not depend on the 'derecognition' of others.

7b. Do you agree that there should not be significantly fewer than the current number of units of assessment?

The majority (88 per cent) of respondents to this question supported the proposition, which was generally applauded as offering stability while allowing a degree of flexibility.

8. In 1998, following a consultation process, the HEFCE rejected the introduction of a 'policy factor' which would have weighted funding towards priority subject areas. Do you agree that a policy factor should not be introduced?

The sector and its stakeholders have remained consistent in their rejection of a policy factor. On this occasion 90 per cent were opposed.

9. Do you agree that there is a case for regular review of the pricing bands in the research funding method?

There was overwhelming support for this recommendation (98 per cent of respondents to this question).

10. Do you agree that the level of project funds available in the arts and humanities should be taken into account in determining subject budgets (quanta)?

Respondents generally agreed (66 per cent of respondents to this question) that this recommendation was 'better than nothing'. However, it was seen as very much a 'second best' solution, the preferred option being a properly funded Arts and Humanities Research Council (see question 11). Organisations representing the sciences, engineering and technology noted that new funding for arts and humanities should not be granted at the expense of their disciplines. Social scientists noted that research funds from the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) are already almost comparable with Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funds as a proportion of available research funding.

The business and management community took the opportunity to state a case for having its own research council.

11. Do you agree that there is a case for the AHRB being formally established as a Research Council?

This was unanimously approved by respondents to this question. Most respondents seemed to assume that the recommendation implied that new funds would be found from Government to support an Arts and Humanities Research Council.

12a. Are there ways in which you believe the HEFCE's funding and assessment methodologies inhibit collaboration?

Views were mixed, with 46 per cent of respondents to this question agreeing that the HEFCE's current assessment and funding methodologies inhibited collaboration. However there was little appetite for policy changes or new funding arrangements from the HEFCE designed to encourage collaboration.

12b. Should the HEFCE provide support for specific research networks?

Only 22 per cent of respondents to this question supported policy changes or new funding arrangements from the HEFCE designed to encourage research networks.

12c. Is there a general case for explicit funding for collaborative research activity?

Only 30 per cent of respondents to this question supported policy changes or new funding arrangements from the HEFCE designed to encourage collaboration.

13. Should there continue to be a research assessment process based on peer review, building on the foundations of the RAE?

There was overwhelming support (98 per cent of respondents to this question) for the maintenance of an RAE-type process.

14/15. Do you agree that further efforts are needed to ensure that the sector understands the RAE process, and particularly the criteria used by panels?

There was general support (86 per cent of respondents to this question) for ongoing efforts to optimise transparency, with a significant number commenting that the process had already become clearer and more navigable.

16. Do you agree that quality of research should continue to be the sole basis for assessment in the RAE?

Many respondents noted that the wording of the question made it hard to dissent from. There was debate as to whether the RAE was capable of giving equal recognition to quality in different types of research. Nevertheless there was strong support for the recommendation (83 per cent of respondents to this question).

17. Do you agree that RAE panels should be given more freedom to collect evidence specific to their discipline?

There was general support (89 per cent of respondents to this question) for this proposal.

18. Do you agree that a new unit of assessment should be considered only after a new discipline has both emerged and achieved maturity?

Most responses (90 per cent of respondents to this question) supported this proposal in principle, while stressing the difficulty of developing a workable definition of 'maturity'.

19. Do you agree that the HEFCE should discontinue GR funding?

There was a strong consensus that GR should be discontinued (84 per cent of respondents to this question) and a lively debate as to where the funding should be diverted. Research-intensive institutions tended to feel it should be recycled into QR. Other respondents were more supportive of the proposition that it should be diverted either to the capability-development fund or to HEROBC.

20. Do you agree that mechanisms should be established for the targeted distribution of HEROBC funds?

There was support for this recommendation from 91 per cent of respondents to this question. The use of the word 'selective' in the report alarmed some respondents, who stressed the importance of employing measures which were genuine incentives to achieve excellence in third leg activities, rather than developing metrics which would inevitably reflect existing levels of research funding.

21a. Do you agree that scholarship is an activity that can be distinguished from research?

This was a sensitive question for many. It was agreed (by 60 per cent of respondents to this question) that scholarship as defined in the report (essentially, continuing professional development for teachers in HE, also described elsewhere as 'scholarship for teaching') was separable from research. But the use of the term 'scholarship' in this context clearly alarmed some institutions and subject associations in the humanities. Many felt strongly that such a minimal definition of scholarship represented a final rejection 'by stealth' of the proposal for a separate funding stream for scholarship, as recommended by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Committee).

To some extent this is true. The review defined as 'research' a number of research activities sometimes described as scholarship. These included the reinterpretation of existing knowledge in the humanities, and pedagogic research relating to higher education (sometimes grouped together with development activity supporting teaching as 'scholarship of teaching'). It further applied that their eligibility for inclusion in the RAE should be confirmed and protected where necessary, but that no additional special measures should be introduced to support them.

21b. Do you agree that scholarship should be required of all academics who teach?

Nearly all responses (96 per cent of respondents to this question) accepted that this was appropriate, given the definition of scholarship employed by the review. Any dissent surrounded the definition itself.

22. Do you agree that funds for teaching are the right source of support for scholarship?

Respondents largely accepted (72 per cent of respondents to this question) that this was appropriate, given the definition of scholarship employed by the review. Those opposed include those who declined to support the recommendation because they objected in principle to the definition of scholarship used.

23. Do you agree that HEFCE funding should encourage research of local, regional and national importance, as well as research of international excellence?

Most respondents assumed that this was a firm proposal for a new funding stream supporting regional research at a lower quality threshold than QR funding. The results are therefore somewhat unreliable as they tend to reflect this misconception, with only a small majority in favour of the proposition.

Some respondents noted that the RAE grade descriptors tended to imply that research with an international focus was by definition superior in quality to other research. They called for a restatement of the proposition that research focused around regional needs could be world-class and, if so, should be rated accordingly.

24. Do you agree that a new stream of capability-development funding should be developed?

There seemed to be a genuine divergence of views between those opposed in principle to the development of new funding streams and those enthused by the possibilities opened up by the proposed capability-development fund.

Among the institutions formerly funded by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council, many supporters of the capability fund noted that their support for other elements of the review was conditional upon the establishment of a funding stream to replace CollR.

25. Do you agree that the HEFCE should modify its funding method to remove incentives to recruit staff and students at the expense of infrastructure?

There was considerable support (61 per cent of respondents to this question) for the notion of encouraging (though not dictating) investment in infrastructure. However, the implication that 'infrastructure' might exclude people and scholarly activities was more controversial. Unsurprisingly, this unease was concentrated in, but by no means confined to, the humanities and social sciences.

26. Do you agree that charitable income should be removed from the volume measure, and charitable grants should instead be supported on an agreed, explicit basis?

There was a significant level of approval in principle (75 per cent of respondents to this question). However, many respondents felt that more details were required before this proposal could be finally approved. The Wellcome Trust was supportive but several organisations representing the health professions were anxious about the proposal. This caution was not surprising in view of the sums involved and the lack of detail in the proposal.

27. Should the HEFCE amend the funding model to take account of the basis on which EU funding is provided?

In all, 71 per cent of respondents supported this proposal. Many institutions' preferred option was for the HEFCE to persuade the EU (and other funders) to fund on a full cost basis without any transfer of funds from the Funding Council.

28. Do you agree that institutions should be expected, in general, to charge prices which at least cover the cost of research they carry out under contract?

There was general support for this proposal (94 per cent of respondents to this question), although a large number of institutions complained that, unless government departments were prepared to pay full costs in the same way as private sector clients, they ought to be considered as part of the dual support system and the marginal cost of accepting their contracts reflected by an increase in QR funding.

29. Do you agree that additional capital funds should be provided annually by the Government for research infrastructure, and these should be earmarked for this purpose when allocated by the HEFCE to institutions?

Both the propositions implicit in this question – that there should be earmarked funding for infrastructure and that it should be additional to existing funds – were enthusiastically supported (94 per cent of respondents to this question).

Several responses noted, however, that 'infrastructure' needed to be defined more broadly than in previous initiatives (the Joint Infrastructure

Fund and the Joint Research Equipment Initiative), and might include certain categories of staff and work supporting a community's research effort (often referred to elsewhere as scholarship).

30. Do you agree with the principle that a proportion of QR should be earmarked specifically for infrastructure investment by the HEFCE?

There was widespread opposition (64 per cent of respondents to this question) to the notion of compelling institutions to spend a given proportion of QR funds on infrastructure, although some responses suggested that advice on appropriate levels of infrastructure investment could be helpful. In general, support for earmarked funds was forthcoming only from those who assumed that the 'infrastructure portion' would be derived from additional funds rather than merely being part of existing core funding.

As with question 29, several responses noted that 'infrastructure' ought to be defined to include more than buildings and large items of equipment.

31. Do you agree that the HEFCE should explore further the reasons behind the relative under-representation of women in the highest-rated departments, and whether other groups appear not to be realising their full research potential?

One respondent noted that this recommendation was so drafted as to be hard to oppose. The implication that problems of equality in HE are confined to the numbers of women in top-rated departments occasioned some comment. Nevertheless, 97 per cent of respondents to this question accepted the proposition.

There was also a widespread feeling that equality issues should be addressed by considering HE employees as staff rather than specifically as teachers or researchers.

32. Do you agree that personal statements should be permitted in a future RAE for those staff for whom a standard submission is not appropriate?

This recommendation achieved broad support. A number of institutions opposed the proposal on the basis that, as presented in the consultation document, it allowed personal statements to be submitted by groups of staff for whom it would not be appropriate. However, there was a consensus that such a facility would be appropriate for, and helpful to, new staff and those returning from career breaks. A minority suggested that adequate processes were already in place to recognise the circumstances of such staff.

33. Do you agree that research training should be the subject of a separate assessment process, linked to the RAE?

This was recognised as a major proposal and many respondents expressed a desire to have more details before registering support for such a major change.

The terminology used caused some confusion: for many, the term 'research training' implied taught courses inculcating research skills, rather than PhD provision as a whole.

Many HEIs suggested that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) was already undertaking a systematic evaluation of research degrees, suggesting a need to clarify the QAA's remit in this area and integrate it with any new quality assessment mechanisms. The need to adopt a co-ordinated approach with the QAA and/or the Research Councils was repeatedly stressed. Those who felt that the proposal could reduce burdens by drawing together existing quality assessment procedures were supportive, while those who interpreted the proposal as implying additional accountability burdens were hostile.

Others, often those most supportive of the principle, felt that the RAE was an inappropriate assessment tool. They suspected that RAE panels would use the quality of publications as a proxy for the quality of the training environment, thereby destroying any incentive for departments to focus upon the human outputs of research as opposed to publications.

34. Do you agree that funding for research students ought to be separated from funding for research?

This, one of the most radical proposals of the review, won a significant degree of support (73 per cent of respondents to this question). This strongly suggests that the RAE in its current form – and

therefore the HEFCE funding model which it drives – is not seen as giving sufficient recognition to the importance of properly supporting the development of research students.

35. Do you agree that the HEFCE should develop and enforce minimum standards for the delivery of postgraduate research programmes?

Despite a general desire for more detail, this proposal was considerably more popular (75 per cent of respondents to this question) than the alternative proposal for an RAE-linked assessment process (question 33). A number of respondents cited the ESRC accreditation process as a possible model.

The proposal was particularly well received by learned societies (12 in favour, none opposed); subject associations were also in favour by a margin of two to one.

There was, nevertheless, a general feeling among supporters of the proposal that any accreditation procedure would have to recognise that the quality of the environment for research students was not simply a function of size or RAE rating.

36. Do you agree that the HEFCE should facilitate collaboration between institutions to support the delivery of postgraduate research programmes?

While there was general support (79 per cent of respondents to this question) for this proposal, there were two particular currents of unease. One noted that collaboration between departments within institutions offered the same potential for adding value with fewer attendant difficulties; the other suggested that the sponsorship of uneven collaborations could lead to a narrowing of the research base and a stifling of innovation as research training was concentrated in historically well-funded institutions.

37a. Do you agree that there is a case for taking steps to ensure adequate PhD output in certain subjects?

There was support (66 per cent of respondents to this question) for this proposal, although it was generally observed that increases in the number and value of studentships were the most powerful lever available to achieve the stated goal.

37b. Do you agree that the proposed capability-development funding stream is the appropriate mechanism for ensuring adequate PhD output?

A majority (57 per cent of respondents) agreed with this proposition. Those in support of both the capability-development funding stream and specific measures to improve PhD throughput in certain subjects were generally supportive. However, some also felt that the capability fund should be focused on its other suggested objectives – research of regional importance and emerging areas of research.

38. Do you agree that institutions should be required to submit a staff development strategy as a condition for the receipt of research funding?

While the balance of opinion was supportive (68 per cent of respondents to this question), some institutions felt that to link the whole QR allocation to a staff development strategy would be to threaten a sanction so drastic that it could never be employed.

A minority of institutions felt that the measure went beyond encouraging HEIs to think strategically about HR matters and constituted an attack on institutional autonomy.

Higher Education Funding Council for England
Northavon House
Coldharbour Lane
BRISTOL
BS16 1QD

tel 0117 931 7317
fax 0117 931 7203
www.hefce.ac.uk

BEST COPY AVAILABLE